1/20 Independent

As The Village Turns

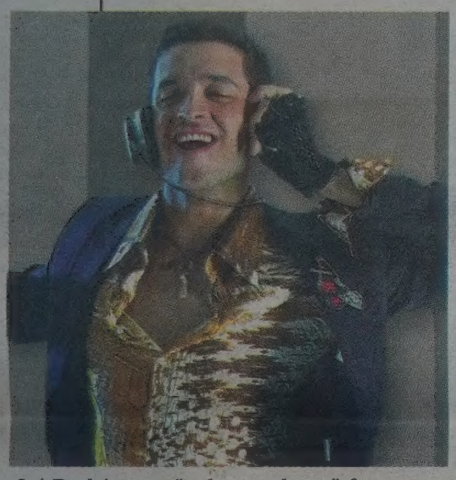
By Rich Tosches

Homo remodeling show

I mark my calendar each year with the dates of the annual Colorado Springs Home Show, a dazzling event in which manufacturers unveil the latest cutting-edge technology and startling advancements in floor mops.

At the 1999 show, for example, I discovered Miracle Mop. For just $19.99 I got unbelievably clean floors and as a bonus could see the image of the Virgin Mary on my linoleum.

Then, at the 2002 show, a manufacturer really pushed the envelope with the Smart Mop, which cleaned my floors, did the *New York Times* crossword and corrected my son's calculus homework. (Sadly, Smart Mop has become Depressed Mop since Dec. 20, 2004, when he was watching CNN and heard President George Bush, in an actual speech in Fort Belvoir, Va., say: "And so, during these holiday seasons, we thank our blessings.")



Jai Rodriguez, "culure vulture" from Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, *appeared at the home show at the Phil Long Expo Center last weekend.*

Anyway, in my quest to stay current on mop technology, I got up early last Saturday and headed for our village's seventh annual Home Show.

Sadly, I didn't find any new mops. So, until Smart Mop snaps out of his funk, I'll have to clean my house the old-fashioned way: spraying End Dust on my Yorkshire terrier and kicking him across the floor.

At the home show I did, however, find Jai (it's pronounced *Jay* but I promise not to make any jokes about it) Rodriguez. He's one of the stars of *Queer Eye For The Straight Guy*, the TV show in which five gay men give fashion, cooking, hairstyle, wardrobe and cultural advice to manly, non-gay men such as me.

Like I need *their* help. (Frankly, the whole idea of needing fashion and grooming tips made me laugh so hard I had to wipe my nose on my orange and green plaid, flannel shirt and re-comb my mullet.)

'Do you have a horse?'

The home show was held in the Phil Long Expo Center, or "big aluminum shed," on the north end of town, very close to the headquarters of Focus on the Family.

(If Focus officials knew a cast member from *Queer Eye* was so close, they would have enrolled him in their highly respected gay conversion program, or "homo remodeling show.")

Jai (who was detained earlier in the day by local police for jaiwalking) is described as the TV show's "culture vulture." He earned this nickname in the first episode when he spotted a man drinking a cabernet with a sea bass lunch and circled him until the guy died.

Jai (last month I saw two bluejais at my bird feeder) appeared for his first presentation at 12:30 p.m. before a standing-room-only crowd of some 250 people in the aluminum shed's "seminar area."

He was quite funny, too, stopping the show at one point to discuss fashion with a big guy wearing a plaid, cut-off shirt and a cowboy hat.

Jai: "Do you have a horse?"

Fashion-challenged man: "No."

Jai: "You should get one."

He said the homes or apartments of all single, heterosexual men smell like dirty feet and they should, at least once a day, give the place a "Lysol spritz." (If I understood him correctly, if you do the Lysol spritz on a regular basis you don't have to wash your feet.)

PG-13 rating

Anyway, the 50-minute presentation was entertaining and informative. As you might imagine, however, some of the villagers around here weren't all that happy about having a *Queer Eye* guy at our home show. Villager Laurel Hill, for example, expressed her anger in a long letter to the editor published last Friday in the *Gazette* (motto: "Throwing The Word of God Down Your Driveway and Under Your Car, Just Like the Apostles Did").

Here now, some actual excerpts from Ms. Hill's letter:

"Should I have to explain to my children what or who the 'Queer Eye' guy is?" she asked in the letter.

The answer, of course, is no. She should not have to explain it to her children. I just hope she doesn't come crying to us when her kids are in their 30s and don't know a pillow sham from a duvet.

"I think," Ms. Hill continued in her letter, "people who want to take their families out to try to find ways to improve their homes should not necessarily have to expose themselves to the gay lifestyle."

I couldn't agree more. Especially on a day like last Saturday, when it was 18 degrees with a brisk north wind.

Ms. Hill went on to write: "Some of us never thought a home show would be something we would have to think about giving a PG-13 rating or having to give our children a 'celebrate diversity' talk beforehand."

I think all of us who are parents know how difficult that "celebrate diversity" talk can be — especially if the little bastards start asking a lot of questions and make Mommy and Daddy late for the Monster Truck Pull.

Laurel's letter also said: "I thought a home show was about windows, floors, painting techniques and decorating, not the gay lifestyle."

Give the place a "Lysol spritz."

Earth to Laurel: Windows, floors, painting techniques and decorating IS the gay lifestyle. Throw in 120 pairs of perfectly folded socks and you've got the whole thing covered.

More from the angry letter: "Sponsors should pick more appropriate guests. I don't care what cable TV thinks all of America wants. Sometimes it's just carpeting and paint and a way to make a better home for our children."

Yup. Carpeting and paint.

That oughta do it.

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Listen to Rich Tosches Thursday mornings on KVUU 99.9 FM

PublicEye

By Cara DeGette

A club for good old boys

It would be terrific to know the extent to which the city's largest public school district relied on the "expertise" of Focus on the Family and other anti-gay groups in a lawsuit seeking recognition of a Gay-Straight Alliance at Palmer High School.

It would be just great to know why they are shelling out taxpayer money at a rate of an estimated $250 an hour to their attorney who just happens to be a Christian evangelical with close ties to Focus on the Family — to battle said Gay-Straight Alliance.

Unfortunately, District 11 isn't saying much. The lawsuit, filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on the behalf of several Palmer students, is designed to force the district to recognize a club that would provide a safe place for students to meet and learn about issues related to sexual orientation.

According to D-11 spokeswoman **Elaine Naleski**. "We have no comment at this time because of the ongoing trial."

Last week, an e-mail and response alluding to Focus on the Family's involvement in the battle against the gay club was introduced into evidence in district court in Denver. Written last Feb. 11, Board President **Sandy Shakes** asked the following of Superintendent **Norm Ridder**:

"I have heard talk about Focus on the Family or other organizations that may help with the legal fees, where are we on that issue? When will we discuss this or get information of substance?" Shakes wrote.

Three days later, on Valentine's Day, Ridder submitted the following response:

"As we discussed on the trip to Tampa, I have met with Mark (sic) Fey and **Mike Haley** from Focus on the Family. They are working with [our attorney] Stuart [Lark] on the Palmer case. Mark (sic) Fey mentioned that at a recent convention sponsored by the Gay-Straight Alliance Organization that Orange County and Colorado Springs has (sic) been targeted because of their christian (sic) fundamental (sic) positions."

"We have no comment at this time ..."

In court last week, Ridder testified that District 11 never paid Focus on the Family for legal help. However, nobody has asked him the size or the scope of Focus' involvement — or any other religious group for that matter. And, at least until the trial is over, Ridder is unavailable to explain how the district came to turn to a Christian ministry for legal advice to deny a club for gay students. But in the meantime, we can take a look at the players involved.

First, **Marc Fey** is the education policy analyst for Focus on the Family. To get an idea of where Mr. Fey is coming from, last year he wrote a glowing review of a book whose title is *Reclaim Your School: 10 Steps to Practically and Legally Evangelize Your School*.

Next meet Mike Haley, manager of the Homosexuality and Gender Issues department at Focus on the Family, which maintains that homosexuals can be "cured." He is also chairman of the board of Exodus International, which promotes the idea that being gay is a choice, and the wrong one at that.

Finally, there's **Stuart Lark**, a partner at Holme, Roberts & Owen, whose Web site lists his areas of specialty as health care, nonprofit organizations and religious organizations — but not education. In 2002, Lark took a year-long leave of absence to work for the Washington D.C.-based Christian Legal Society. He currently is the chairman of the board of the Colorado Springs chapter of the Christian Management Association, whose mission is "to equip our member organizations with management information, leadership training and strategic networking relationships so ministries are led and managed in God-honoring ways." At least one other board member of the networking group is from Focus on the Family.

All of these men are probably perfectly nice people. But with all due respect, why in the heck have school district officials allowed a taxpayer-supported entity to be manipulated by a group with a clear conflict?

This week, District 11 board member **Karen Teja** had this answer. "I'm appalled we would seek assistance from Focus on the Family," she said. "If the majority of the board feels the district has the right for litigation, we should seek it on our own merits versus involving special interests."

Perhaps the district should consider a guide on gay clubs that was prepared by the National School Board Association, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers — and was recently distributed to every school board and high school principal in the country. There are currently nearly 3,000 student Gay-Straight Alliance clubs across the country — including 65 in Colorado. **Joshua Lamont**, a spokesman for the national Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN), pointed out that courts across the country have ruled in favor of such clubs.

Quite frankly [District 11] could save a lot in legal fees if they read that document," Lamont said.

It might be too late for that.

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